

Was Pres. Shonts (The New York Traction Magnate) Vamped?

How "My Friend Amanda Thomas," Chorus Girl, Twice Married and Won the Old Millionaire's Affection and Turned With a "Will" That Gives Her His Estate



From photograph of the comedian and two chorus girls in the old "Girl From Up There" company. The big girl in the centre has been identified as Mrs. Amanda Thomas, who was at that time playing in the company under the name of "Jeanne Caskie."

CHAPTER XII.

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(Continued from Last Sunday)

THE question was raised last Sunday as to whether Theodore Shonts was really happy in his life with Amanda Thomas.

This is an important thing to know for many reasons. It has a broader bearing than merely asking it as an idle question. It is a matter of public importance. Was Shonts really happy with "the other woman" in the scandalous domestic triangle he built for himself?

Shonts gave up wife, children, social position and what promised to be a really big career for Mrs. Thomas. He was criticised and insulted by his best friends because of Mrs. Thomas. He became somewhat of a social outcast through his relations with Mrs. Thomas. He paid handsomely in money for Mrs. Thomas's endearments and attentions.

And if, after all, it turns out that Theodore Shonts was not happy with Mrs. Thomas—then, in addition to Rev. Dr. Stratton's moral lesson, may be added the lesson that Shonts made a poor bargain when he threw over his family and took on the former chorus girl. If Shonts paid the price of family, of personal disgrace and of enormous financial expense—and did not secure happiness, then it was an empty bargain on his part and may well be pondered by others.

Was Shonts happy with "my friend Amanda"?

Of course, at first he was—and at times later on he was. But in his heart did he dread the violent scenes with Mrs. Thomas? Was he hopelessly enmeshed with the clever woman who had mastered him? Did Shonts yearn for his wife and his little grandson, but fear the terrible tongue and clenched fist of the woman who had become his master?

Here is an illuminating narrative of daily life in the Shonts-Thomas establishment by a member of the household who was a keen observer:

"When I first went to work at Mrs. Thomas's house at No. 44 East Thirty-fifth street Mr. Shonts called every day during the time I was employed there, sometimes two and three times. When he called during the daytime he spent most of the time he was in the house on the second floor, where Mrs. Thomas's bedroom and sitting room were. When Mr. Shonts was in the house Mrs. Thomas allowed no servants on the second floor. He also came at night for dinner.

"Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Shonts had recently returned from a Summer tour around Europe. She brought back

"IF the wronged wife is finally robbed and the other woman gets this money, will not the tendency be for every weak girl in the city to ask herself the question, 'If she did these things and got away with it and now flourishes, why may not I?'"

These words are from the recent sermon of the Rev. Dr. Stratton, and he was pointing to the moral lesson of the double life of the late Theodore P. Shonts and his "friend" Amanda C. Thomas.

Will Mrs. Thomas "get away with it?"

The courts of New York have already begun to answer that question.

Amanda Thomas almost "got away with it." She misled the Surrogate with a suspicious "last will" which crowded out Mrs. Shonts, the widow, and the daughters, and gave the traction magnate's estate to Amanda.

But the tide has turned.

The courts have begun to investigate the Shonts triangle.

For a brief few weeks Mrs. Thomas and her intimate friends and lawyers got control of the Shonts estate by producing that astonishing "last will." Mrs. Shonts, the widow, had been thrown out as admin-

istratrix. Once more Amanda triumphed—once more the widow was humiliated. But the Supreme Court has upset Amanda Thomas's plans. Mrs. Shonts has been put back in control of the estate—Mrs. Thomas's lawyers and friends are not now in the saddle.

Here is what the Judges of the Appellate Court say about the extraordinary "last will":

"At most it was an alleged will, assailed as the ineffectual testamentary effort of an enfeebled mind, governed and controlled by undue and sinister influence, and, therefore, incapable of probate as the will of the deceased."

And again the Court says the Surrogate was warned that—

"It was a pretended will, whereby the petitioner said the deceased had attempted to make a will leaving the largest part of his estate to a woman—Mrs. Amanda C. Thomas—unrelated to him or his family, to whose influence he had been subjected for a considerable period prior to his death, and that at the time of the making of the alleged will and for a considerable time prior thereto the deceased was mentally incompetent to make a will."

"Will the other woman get away with it?" Rev. Dr. Stratton asks—and already the courts are beginning to give the answer.

with her great bolts of cloth, which she was then having made into dresses. Mrs. Thomas had from one to three dressmakers constantly working for her by the day. She spent many hours each day trying on and fitting new dresses, and it was her habit to have servants come into her sitting room and look at new dresses on her and give her their opinions of them.

"I heard her say one day:

"Well, what is his money good for if it isn't to buy clothes for me? Look what I give him—I'm going to collect some way. He's got enough to buy me all the clothes in Europe—and if he doesn't watch out I'll make him buy them." Other servants heard this remark, and we discussed it among ourselves.

"At another time I heard Mr. Shonts say to Mrs. Thomas:

"Don't you think you've had enough clothes made for a while? Where are you going to wear them? You can't wear them out with me—who are you going to wear them with?"

"Oh, I'll wear them all right," Mrs. Thomas replied. "Anyway, you'll be getting that old woman to divorce you pretty soon—won't you, dear?—and then we can be married and it will be all right for us to go around together."

"I don't know whether we can plan that or not," Mr. Shonts said.

"Well, you'd better!" Mrs. Thomas answered. "Do you think I'm going to stand for this sort of thing forever? You've got to divorce her if she won't divorce you. You're big enough in this town to get anything you want—and I don't want you to give her a lot of money either."

"I did not hear the rest of this conversation."

"Mr. Shonts and Mrs. Thomas kept to themselves largely in Mrs. Thomas's personal rooms on the second floor. But at meal times and at various other times they were about the house and the other members of the household saw and heard what was going on. They did not seem to care very much if their conversations were overheard by those who were at work within hearing distance of them."

"Mrs. Thomas was not very tidy about her personal appearance when she was about the house with the servants, but when Mr. Shonts telephoned from his office that he was coming to the house she would hurry into her bedroom and change her dress and put on a pretty house gown, comb her hair and powder her face. Then she would call in some one to look at her and tell her if she 'looked pretty.' She would then order coffee made, and if it were lunch time she would look into the kitchen and see that the lunch was ready to serve and that everything was cooked to suit Mr. Shonts's taste."

"When Mr. Shonts entered the door she would rush to him and throw her arms around him and call him 'Teddy, dear,' and kiss him, and would take his hat and coat and pet him and talk honeyed words to him like a baby would talk. Mr. Shonts seemed to enjoy this very much. He would kiss her repeatedly, and was very affectionate toward her."

"One day I heard Mrs. Thomas say: 'Teddy has been getting stingy lately. You just watch me give him a lesson.' 'A short time after this when Mr. Shonts arrived one day she did not go down to meet him, but had the maid tell him, 'Mrs. Thomas is upstairs.' He went up and soon we heard them talking loudly. I heard Mrs. Thomas say: 'You have plenty of money to give your family, but when I want money lately you say your expenses are running too high—you can just let that old hag wife of yours go without money instead of me. She'll stand for it, but I won't!'"

house toward noon each day, and often had lunch served there to Mr. Shonts and herself.

"When Mr. Shonts told her his family was coming back on the steamer and would soon arrive he said to her that he would have to take them in at the Plaza, and that she couldn't come there any more while they were there. Mrs. Thomas flew into a rage and told him he must not allow his family to come to the Plaza where he was. He said he would have to do it, and that he would have to spend a lot of time with them, but that he would come to the Thirty-fifth street house as often as he could. He said Mrs. Shonts was ill, and that he did not like to have her go any place else. He said one of his daughters, Theodora I think, was also coming back on the steamer, and also was ill, and that he did not want her far away from him."

"Mrs. Thomas at this became very angry. From the basement we heard their high-pitched voices in their quarrel. I heard Mrs. Thomas say:

"If you take that gang of — back again I'll kill you, you —!"

"That's enough of that," Mr. Shonts said. "You're talking about my wife and daughters, and I'll not stand it. They're better than you ever were or ever will be!"

"Oh, they are, are they?" Mrs. Thomas screamed. "Then we heard glass break, and heard Mr. Shonts swearing terribly and Mrs. Thomas shrieking. More glass broke and furniture fell."

"Pretty soon Mr. Shonts came out of the door to the sitting room and slammed it behind him and started downstairs. Mrs. Thomas rushed out and cried:

"You come back here—come back here. If you don't I'll follow you into the street! Come back here!"

"Mr. Shonts stopped and said, 'You keep still now. I won't stand this. If you come downstairs I'll break your neck!'"

"You will, will you!—I'll show you!" Mrs. Thomas cried, and she threw at him a china vase which stood on a pedestal at the top of the stairs. Mr. Shonts dodged just in time to miss being hit on the head. He went on downstairs and out to his car and drove away. Mrs. Thomas slammed the door shut on herself, and we heard more breaking glass, and then all was quiet. Later in the day I went in to clean up the room and found many of the vases were broken and the mirror in Mrs. Thomas's dressing table was shattered by a vase somebody had thrown."

"Mr. Shonts did not come back next morning, but he telephoned at noon and soon after came up. Mrs. Thomas met him at the door and told him she was sorry and asked him to forgive her, and said, 'But you know, Teddy dear, it makes me so angry, just like a mad woman, when I think you will let those women make a fool of you and make you take them back. They don't love you, and I do, and some day you'll know that the only woman you can love and trust is your Mandy.'"

"Let's say nothing about it," Mr. Shonts said. "The family will be in to-morrow, and let's have as good a time as we can till they come. I'll get rid of them as soon as I can. Does that please you?"

"I know you will, Teddy dear," Mrs. Thomas replied, "and then we can be alone together again."

"Mrs. Thomas was frequently talking to men who came to see her about her 'rich man.' I don't know who these men were, as she called them by their first names. There were two of them who came often, one young man and one much older. She received them in her sitting room. She told them of things Mr. Shonts said and did, and once I heard her say:

"We are going to Europe again next Summer, and this time I'm going to get jewelry instead of clothes—I've enough clothes now to last me a lifetime, but I can still use a lot of jewelry. He'll get me anything I want as long as I kiss him a lot. His wife never kissed him enough—that's all he needs."

Smashing crockery? Hurling things at Mr. Shonts? Screaming profanity at him? Threatening, yelling, fighting—like a tenement brawler?

Did Amanda Thomas lose her temper and behave like a virago? Is there corroborative evidence of this?

The narrative of the row at the Long Beach cottage told last Sunday, as related by neighbors to Mrs. Shonts, may be briefly recalled:

About 9 o'clock one morning there was a loud com-

motion from the Shonts cottage. The voice of Mrs. Thomas was heard high and shrill pouring out a volley of oaths which were punctuated by the crash of crockery. Shonts could be heard trying to reason with her, trying to calm her, imploring her to keep quiet.

"Shonts finally appeared on the porch in a great hurry, and behind him came Amanda in negligee, half clad, filling the air with words that were not pleasant to hear. She had in her hand the neighbors told Mrs. Shonts, a large table lamp, and as Shonts turned and made a last stand, trying to reason with her, she hurled the lamp at Shonts. The missile just missed his head and smashed upon the floor of the porch. Shonts made his escape, with Amanda shouting after him."

Violent temper and profanity were rather easy to stir up, it would seem, although not every row ended in Mr. Shonts having to dodge a lamp or a vase shied at his massive head. Here is a rather mild rumble which started in with a smashed coffee cup. But Shonts, profiting by other experiences, appears to have cut short the gathering storm by escaping before the crockery began to fly.

Jules Bizuel, who was with them at the West End avenue apartment house, describes this little scene as follows:

"Mrs. Thomas frequently asked Mr. Shonts to take her to the theatre. They went very seldom, however. Once she was anxious, it seemed, to go to the Metropolitan Opera House. Mr. Shonts had agreed to go with her, but the day of the opera he said at breakfast he didn't believe he could go, because he understood either a Mrs. Belmont or a Mrs. Widener, I forget which, would be there, and he guessed it would be better judgment to forego the affair."

"Mrs. Thomas at this flew into a terrible rage. She slammed down her coffee cup with such violence that it broke. 'You're a d— coward!' Mrs. Thomas said. Mrs. Shonts was angered, and said, 'That's enough of your temper now. I'll do what I think is best and you need any other woman is going to dictate to me!'"

"He threw back his chair and started out. I was in the room, having just served the cereal. I almost got in his way. He said at me, 'Get out of my way!'"

"He then went downstairs without his hat and left the apartment downstairs a little while later, getting a hat from there. Mrs. Thomas went to the door to catch him in the hall, but was too late. As she came back she mumbled to herself, 'I'll fix him, the ass!'"

Jules knew Mrs. Thomas thoroughly well—more thoroughly than Amanda quite realized. When Mrs. Shonts began her \$1,000,000 suit against "my friend Amanda" Mrs. Thomas was anxious to get in touch with Jules. Many mysterious messages and messengers began to bother him and finally he called at her photograph shop on Fifth avenue. This is Jules Bizuel's narrative of what happened at that visit:

"In the course of a few days three different persons called to see me at my present place of employment which is in the home of a very wealthy industrial magnate, each one asking me if I were the 'Jules' who was with Mr. Shonts and Mrs. Thomas. None of the persons would tell me who he was, nor why he came to see me, nor from whom. To each I replied that I could not answer any questions put to me so mysteriously."

"At last I wondered if Mrs. Thomas were sending these messengers. I did not want to be bothered further, so one Saturday I went to her photograph studio on Fifth avenue and asked to see her, telling the studio reception clerk that I was 'Jules' and wished to see Mrs. Thomas. I stood near the door of her private office. She opened the door and looked at me. After a start of surprise she said:

"My God, Jules, is it really you? I thought you were in France, or killed. What are you doing in this country?"

"There was a decided note of regret in her voice—that I was not in France or killed. Mrs. Thomas immediately ushered me into her private office, closed and